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ABSTRACT

This paper envisions one possible future relationship between the Agricultural Education Division of the American Vocational Association and its Agricultural Education Advisory Council. The author imagines that the year is 1985 and describes some of the imaginary changes that have occurred in the interim. These changes involve the establishment of a national professional organization of agricultural educators, initiation for planning that emanates at the State level, and the adoption of futures planning or the careful probing of the future to identify alternatives and examine the possible consequences of each. In each of these imagined changes, the lay-expert advisory council has played a key role in stimulating action for change and in serving as a communication link between the profession and industry. In conclusion the author returns to the present and reiterates his theme more explicitly: (1) The future is being shaped by decisions, or lack of decisions, which are made each day; (2) those who continuously carefully examine the alternative futures and their consequences are best able to make conscious decisions to bring about the most desirable future; and finally (3) the agricultural education profession must unify its efforts and initiate the ongoing futures planning process in which the advisory council can be of continued assistance. (Author/NJ)

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION DIVISION AND THE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL -- ONE POSSIBLE FUTURE *

Introduction

The topic "Relationship Between the Agricultural Education Division and the Advisory Council" can be approached from many directions. Meeting here near the famous Disneyland provides an excellent setting to spend a few minutes of our time living in the future. I cannot take you to a material setting such as Walt Disney has created, but I will attempt to describe in words what the future could be.

As stated in the book, Futurism in Education, edited by Hencley and Yates, futures planning can serve as a bridge to take us from the present to a point in time in the future. This presentation is a brief trip into the future. It represents only one of the multiplicity of alternatives which may become the future.

My hope is to point out that each person in this room can and will influence the future in which we will be living. This presentation will alter the future. It will provide you with information which shall influence your thinking. It will influence your planning and your decision making to some degree, just as all events in your life impact upon your thinking.

A Look Into the Future

In order to escape from the confines of the past and present, I ask everyone to shut their eyes. Now open your eyes! It is the year 1985, and you are attending the 79th Annual American Vocational Association Convention. You are participating in a meeting of the Association of Educators in Agriculture.

Do you remember some of the events which led up to this meeting? To help refresh your memory, I will present a short scenario beginning with today, December 7, 1985 and systematically take you back some ten years to the meeting many of us attended in this same room in 1975.

Last year, 1984, the Agricultural Education profession responded to the changing times in a positive manner. A National professional organization was established. There is now a unified organization

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of Agricultural Educators, functioning under a constitution and by-laws, to serve the needs of and speak for the profession. The National organization is affiliated with the American Vocational Association through the Agricultural Education Division of the AVA, operating in that capacity under the constitution and by-laws of AVA.

As you know, our National organization consists of three affiliated organizations; the National Vocational Agriculture Teacher's Association, the National Association of Supervisors of Agricultural Education, and the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture. And the National organization continues to have a lay-expert advisory council, as charted in 1975.

The National organization has chapters in each state and territory. These state chapters consist of the members of the three affiliated organizations (NVATA, NASAE, and AATEA) and each has a lay-expert advisory council to assure communication between the profession and industry.

The state chapters are organized into Regions based upon the commonalities of contiguous states and territories. The Regions consist of the membership of the affiliated organizations. While there is no Regional lay-expert advisory council, members of the state and territorial councils do meet during Regional sessions to discuss concerns common to the states in the Region.

The National organization has a headquarters and employs professional and clerical staff. The headquarters staff represents the unified profession at appropriate meetings, serves the essential needs of the teachers of agriculture, and provides important services to the teacher educators, state supervisors, and lay-expert advisory council at the National level. The headquarters staff maintains liaison with the AVA, and legislative bodies at the National level.

The Middle 1980's

The major breakthrough which led up to the establishment of the National organization occurred in the middle 1980's. The Agricultural Education profession developed a procedure whereby each state could develop its own Agricultural Education organization which included the three participatory units (NVATA, AATEA, NASAE) plus an advisory council of lay-experts. Under this concept, planning began to emanate from the state level and reflect the changing needs of each state.

To accomplish this the role and function of the Agricultural Education Division of AVA at the National level had to be altered somewhat. A newly defined unified national organization became the national forum, the sounding board for the states and the three participatory units. The National organization became the "flagship" of the unified profession, serving to maintain the philosophy and standards of the profession and to speak for the profession both within and outside of the AVA structure. The lay-expert advisory council continued to serve as the communications link between the profession and agricultural industry.

The Early 1980's

The initial move toward a National organization occurred as the results of futures planning were being assimilated by the Agricultural Education Division and its advisory council in the early 1980's. It became evident early in the 1980's that a need existed for what Alvin Toffler, a leading futurist of the 1970's, had described in the October 1975 issue of the Futurist as a custom tailored, continually flexible and changing plans, which cannot be custom tailored from the top down. The Nation had moved closer to becoming Toffler's "super-industrialized" nation supplanting the traditional pyramidical-bureaucratic forms of organizations with new participatory networks of organizations. Standardization of information, centralization of information, and concentration of power were no longer the key words. The use of econometric models and esoteric input-output models was no longer appropriate.

The Agricultural Education Division began to examine its traditional structure and relationship to AVA in light of the changing times. It was recognized that the Division was a unification of three participatory units; NVATA, NASAE, AND AATEA, and a national advisory council. However, the structure of the division and the participatory units still reflected the traditional pyramidal-bureaucratic form of organizations.

The Late 1970's

By the late 1970's the Agricultural Education Division had been involved in futures planning for several years. This activity was stimulated by the lay-expert advisory council. The division, using funds made available through AVA as a result of the earlier dues increase, reorganized the Program Development Commission. This commission consisted of leaders in the profession and persons serving on the Policy Committee. The commission was responsible for futures planning and reported directly to the Policy Committee. The Policy Committee continued to spend significant time on programatic matters, and worked closely with the advisory council. The advisory council was now officially chartered and functioned under a constitution and by-laws.

The model for futures planning developed by the Agricultural Education Division was put forth by AVA as a model for all of the vocational education division.

AVA recognized that it, as stated by Harold G. Shane in the September 1975 issue of the Phi Delta Kappan, must stand guard against educators and citizens who are exploitive, self-seeking, short-sighted, or in any way prone to make reality more harsh, alternatives fewer, and consequences more distressing. AVA encouraged its divisions to probe the future, to identify and examine the possible alternatives, and to carefully examine the consequences of each alternative. The lay-expert advisory council played a key, essential role in the Agricultural Education Division's deliberations.

The Middle 1970's

During the middle 1970's the Agricultural Education Division began what we now recognize as a continuing futures planning process as a result of questions being asked by the then newly reorganized lay-expert advisory council.

The American Vocational Association was facing membership and financial problems. A considerable amount of time and effort was spent developing a solution which resulted in an increase in membership dues and the implementation of plans to increase the number of members. This linear approach created membership unrest.

During this period of time the Agricultural Education Policy Committee played a major leadership role in AVA. The Policy Committee was primarily concerned with AVA matters as they pertained to Agricultural Education. A Program Development Commission had been established earlier, as part of the Agricultural Education Division. Policy Committee members were also members of the Program Development Commission. As a result, the majority of the efforts of the Division focused upon AVA policy matters. The Development Commission and its associated advisory committee became nearly non-functional during the early period of the middle 1970's.

Realizing that the programatic concerns were not receiving adequate attention, the Program Development Commission took steps to reorganize the advisory committee. These lay-experts asked probing questions and did not accept trite answers phrased in educational jargon. In effect, the advisory council was telling the Agricultural Education profession to develop a clear image of the educational future considered to be desirable.

Summary

Looking backward from today, December 7, 1985, we can observe that the lay-expert advisory committee stimulated what was the beginning of the conscious, planned effort by a unified Agricultural Education profession to help create the future the profession most desired. A group of leaders, many of whom are here today, met in this very room in December of 1975 and initiated what has been recorded as a major step in the history of Agricultural Education. That group initiated a process of continuous futures planning. They were determined to assure as best they could, that the future was a result of conscious decision making, based upon an awareness of the alternative futures and their consequences. While futures planning was not an easy task, it has resulted in a stronger unified profession and a quality of programs of agricultural education unequaled in the world.

Conclusion

I must ask you to again close your eyes. Now open them! You have returned to the year 1975; we are back in the present.

I will conclude by stating that my scenario was brief and therefore not fully developed. However, it was meant to be positive. I might have as easily presented a "doomsday" scenario.

The main message, hopefully not too well hidden in this presentation, is that:

1. The future is being shaped by decisions, or lack of decisions, being made each day.

2. Those who continuously carefully examine the alternative futures and their consequences are best able to make conscious decisions which will bring about the most desirable future, and finally

3. The Agricultural Education profession must unify its efforts and initiate an on-going futures planning process; this is what I hear the advisory council telling us--and this is one activity in which the advisory council can continue to assist us with.

You are the group that I referred to in the closing statements of my scenario. What will history say? Will this part of the scenario come true?

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